SUMMIT ON INTEROPERABLE COMMUNICATIONS FOR PUBLIC SAFETY

Kathy Higgins

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Thank you, Arden. And thank you all for being here.

I also want to take a moment to thank the people who helped to organize this summit. They not only arranged for us all to be in one room at one time -- which is no small achievement -- but also assembled the outstanding briefing book you have in your hands. This document and this event mark the beginning of a concerted effort to remedy some grievous shortcomings within our public safety and security infrastructure, and I especially want to recognize the two people most responsible -- Dereck Orr and Val Pietrasiewicz.

Dereck is the new kid on our block. He took over as Program Manager of OLES's Public Safety Communications Standards Program just 6 months ago, and really hit the ground running. His talent for motivating and organizing people made

today possible -- and confirms that we certainly made the right decision when we put OLES' communications program in his hands.

Many of you know Val. He is the Chief of the Telecommunications and IT Planning Division at the Institute for Telecommunications Sciences at NTIA -- and the lead investigator for OLES's work on public safety communications. He's more than our technical eyes and hands -- he's our Communications Wizard in Residence. It's his understanding of the technical realities and his vision of the technical possibilities, and those of his very talented team, that guide our work on behalf of NIJ's AGILE program.

Dereck, Val -- thank you.

Back in the early 1900s, the *London Times* ran an unusual classified ad. It read, "Men wanted for hazardous journey. Low wages, bitter cold, long hours of complete darkness. Safe return doubtful. Honour and recognition in the event of success."

Hardly a blurb that the spin doctors here in Washington would give much chance for success. But early the next morning, 5,000 people were lined up outside the *Times* office. The rest is history, because the person who placed that ad was Ernest Shackleton, and from among those 5,000 came the adventurers who accompanied him on his historic expedition to the South Pole.

I'm sure the *London Times* was flabbergasted at the turnout. Shackleton was surprised -- although maybe not as much as he let on. He understood human nature pretty well. In much the same way, I'm sure we're all surprised by the number of us here today.

I didn't doubt for a moment that those of us who work in this field would jump at an opportunity to put our heads together and swap ideas. But I am astonished at how many of us there are -- and how many programs and organizations we represent. There are over sixty programs and organizations represented in this briefing book. Unfortunately not all could attend, but the vast majority are here today. And although we tried to identify as many federal and national level programs as

we could, we know there are many more that we did not run across.

Which just goes to show how big a challenge we're trying to tackle. Interoperable communications is a field so vast and complex that more than 5 dozen programs and organizations have been hammering away at different aspects of it -- many of us for years -- and most of us didn't know about more than a handful of the others. We've had only a handful of people to discuss ideas with -- a handful of resources to draw on.

All that has changed this morning. Looking around the room, suddenly we all have dozens more colleagues than we thought we had. Dozens more brains to pick. And that, as plainly as I can say it, is the goal of this Summit: to pick each other's brains.

We're here to share perspectives and prognoses. To find out what others are doing -- what's working and what isn't. To identify where our programs intersect and can contribute to each other -- and where critical work is needed but no one is

yet doing it. We're here to make new connections and tap new resources.

I'll tell you right off the bat that you're not going to find much if you decide to pick my brain. I'm strictly program administration. The brains you want to pick are Dereck's and Val's -- and when you do you're going to get information, ideas and not a few opinions on the technical aspects of interoperable communications.

That's what NIST is good at -- the technicals. NIST is proud of its national, and international, reputation as a technical expert in many diverse areas, and particularly enjoys the position of being an honest broker. As we approach complex issues, we do so without having any predetermined bias toward or against existing or emerging technologies, commercial products or services, or standards developed here or elsewhere. Rather, we relish the challenge of researching and analyzing the facts that present themselves on behalf of the public safety community.

For studies related to telecommunications, in general, and to interoperable communications among public safety entities, in particular, we maintain that proper scientific and engineering research, development, testing, evaluation of technologies, as well as the development of standards can and WILL lead to effective technical solutions. Of course, this is predicated on the basis that our work at OLES flows from the ground up. We work on behalf of the public safety community and insure that they have a voice thoughout the entire process. Now, we are willing to wager that the people in this room have already done a great deal of exemplary work in addressing the needs of the public safety community and are formulating a number of strong technical approaches for confronting them. We welcome the opportunity to disseminate the information about this work more widely.

As part of the NIST family, my Office, the Office of Law Enforcement Standards, or OLES, is proud of the contributions to public safety that we have been making since OLES was established at NIST to support the National Institute of Justice in 1971. For 32 years we've worked with the criminal justice and public safety communities to identify their requirements for critical technologies. We've created performance standards

based on those requirements. We've helped establish independent testing programs that determine whether a device -- regardless of whose brand name is on it, what color it is, or whether it's made in Akron or Osaka -- complies with the standard. While the OLES Program has expanded to include forensics, critical incident technologies and weapons and protective systems, communications was one of the first program areas that OLES addressed, and remains one of the central points of focus today.

We realize that we really have somewhat of an easy job in this Summit -- for two reasons. First, we will be providing information to you that you provided to us. While we have done some processing to allow you to see how the programs are addressing the various functional requirements that we have summarized roughly for public safety, we have not attempted to solve the significant issues associated with telecommunications interoperability and information sharing. Instead we have simply attempted to layout the TECHNICAL facts.

The emphasis on the TECHNICAL elements of the programs leads me to the second reason why our job at this Summit is not too difficult. As we have stated before, in large formal briefings and in elevator conversations alike, the technical side of interoperability is MUCH, MUCH easier to address than the political, administrative, fiscal, and governance issues that surround any discussion on this topic. We are most happy to provide our experience and expertise in approaching the numerous aspects of public safety applications related to wireless telecommunications and information technology, but we realize that there are much larger challenges to take on in the non-technical areas.

With that said, I have to admit that, as great as the technical challenges are, they pale compared to the issues most of you wrestle with -- issues like communication policies and politics, fiscal resources, administrative restructuring, jurisdictional territorialism. And that's where many people outside our field make a mistake. They think that interoperable communications can be achieved with the infusion of some new gadgets and gizmos. The truth is that achieving interoperable communications requires major shifts in the way everybody

thinks about communications -- not just government agencies but equipment vendors, service providers and First Responders themselves.

There's plenty of work to do -- more than enough to go around -- and clearly these issues extend far beyond this room. But for the next two days they intersect here. The call went out. And even though all of us already knew about the hazards, the low wages, and the long hours -- and that it's unlikely there will be much honor and recognition at the end of it all -- we all showed up. That says a lot about our commitment to this country and the hundreds of thousands of police, firefighters, EMTs, security personnel, and others who are looking to us for help.

As we work together, and share information, it is important to realize that we are here to take an objective look at what is going on. There is no question that there are plenty of interoperability problems to go around, and therefore more help is better than less help. Once we know what others are doing, we may be able to leverage off of others, for the benefit of all.

Your attendance here today shows a commitment to the overall goals of this Summit. Let's put that commitment to good use. Let's demonstrate that interoperable communications really are possible by establishing interoperability and communications among ourselves and our programs.

This Summit will be a great success if relationships are formed among programs. It will be successful if one program manager hears something that triggers an idea that saves years of effort and millions of dollars. And most of all, it will be a wonderful success if one thing that we do today, saves a life tomorrow.

Thank you.

Kathy Higgins